

The Star People



Most American Indian tribes used the stars as indicators of the time for seasonal ceremonies and their position when they were traveling across the land, but only one tribe was called the Star People. These were the Pawnee. Their oldest traditions assert that their people came from the southwestern U.S., where they would have had contact with Indians from Central and South America. From there, they traveled east to the Mississippi River and settled near the Red River. In this area, they became part of the Caddoan tribes, who called them 'Awahi,' the Star People. The term 'Caddo' meant 'true chiefs,' and these people were descendants of the Mound Builders, who worshipped the Serpent and the Star. The Star that fell to earth was represented by a secret fire. The Caddo, as well as the early Pawnee, may have been influenced in their stellar cosmology by the more southern tribes, including the Maya.

From the southeast, the Pawnee traveled north along the Mississippi, dividing into at least three tribal groups, the Pawnee, the Skiri and the Wichita. The Skiri went far north and eventually forgot about being Pawnee, while the Wichita settled to the west. The Pawnee were divided into three bands, the Chawi or Grand Pawnee, the Kitkahahki or Republican Pawnee, and the Pitahawirata or Tappage Pawnee. Eventually, the Pawnee moved farther north and the Skiri were reabsorbed to become the fourth Pawnee band. Another tribe even farther north, the Arikara, are believed to be an offshoot of the Skiri. The tribe is today called the Pawnee, so named by the Sioux, who called them 'Panyis,' referring to the red crest they wear in their hair. The Skiri (Wolf band) became so dominant among the Pawnee that other tribes called the Pawnee the Wolf People and the sign for 'wolf' came to mean 'Pawnee.'



The Pawnee differ from other tribes in not following the positions of the Sun or the phases of the Moon; instead, they follow the Stars. When the Pawnee moved north on the Plains, a Pawnee called Closed Man had a vision of the Pawnee as children of the Star Gods. As a result, the Pawnee began to build their earth lodges in a new way. The old lodges were rectangular, but the new earth lodges were circular, with a dome-shaped roof. This was said to be in imitation of the dome of the night sky. They also built their lodges to imitate the placement of important Stars in the sky. Four poles hold up the center of the lodge, painted white, yellow, red and black for the Four Direction Stars: white is Sirius, yellow is Capella, red is Antares, black is Vega. On the longest night of the year, just before dawn, they are seen shining just above the horizon in the Four Directions.

Next to the Great Chief Star (Polaris, the North Star), three stars form an arc, representing the Medicine Man, his wife and their errand man. Pawnee Chiefs use the smoke hole in their lodges to sight the Stars known as the Council of Chiefs (Corona Borealis) passing overhead at dawn. The Stars announce the cycle of rebirth and renewal. Festivals are held at night, when the people can see the Stars, and planting ceremonies are held around midnight, when the seven stars of the Chaka (the Women) or Pleiades are directly overhead. The most important Stars are called the Swimming Ducks. These are the two bright Stars in the tail and stinger of the constellation of Scorpio, Lambda Scorpii and Upsilon Scorpii. When they are seen in the twilight of the southeastern sky before sunrise, the Pawnee know it is time to begin the ceremonies of spring, as soon as the first rolling thunder of spring is heard.

The Milky Way is the ghost pathway of departed spirits. Just above the Milky Way is a spot devoid of any stars, and this is where the spirits of the dead return to the place beyond the Stars. The Milky Way is divided into two parts, one for those who died of natural causes and the other for people who died prematurely, as in battle. The Stars of the east are male Stars, and the greatest among them is a red Star known as Morning Star. Stars considered to be stationed in the west are female, and the most important one is a bright white Star called the Evening Star. The Morning Star is the planet Mars, and the Evening Star is the planet Venus. The appearance of the Wolf Star (Sirius) signifies the Wolf coming and going from the spirit world, running down the bright white trail of the Milky Way, which is also called the Wolf Road.



Each village had its own myth, which told of its founder having been created by a star or group of stars. Subsequently, Evening Star sent the thunder to give the founder a sacred bundle, which represented its power and would serve as a source of power to which the people could later turn for good fortune and assistance in their quest for food and in their social needs. For this reason, the Medicine Bundle is always hung on the west wall of the lodge. Evening Star has sent other spiritual power to help man, including the animal spirits called Nahurac and the forces of the earth. Also, man is taught about his true nature in dreams and visions.

The contents of the Medicine Bundle consisted of the paraphernalia to form an altar around which the bundle's own ritual was performed, as well as sacred objects collected as a result of subsequent dreams and visions by the bundle's owner. The Medicine Bundles contain star maps made from many years of observations, which are used in ceremonies. Stars are drawn on these star charts as four-pointed stars, which was how the Pawnee represented stars in their artwork prior to the coming of the white man. After they saw the U.S. flag, with its five-pointed stars, they started drawing their stars with five points. When the founder of a village died, his bundle and his chieftaincy were passed on to his son.

The Pawnee Cosmology
(after White Eagle)



In the beginning, only the Council of Gods existed. They were headed by Tirawahat, the Universe. His Chief was the expanse of the heavens, the Stars, called Tirawa, the All-Powerful. His dark companion was his wife, Atira. Tirawa told the gods where each would be stationed upon the creation of the Earth.

He told Sakuru, the Sun, to stand in the east in order to give light and warmth, and Pah, the Moon, to stand in the west to provide light when darkness comes upon the Earth. Then he turned to Tcuperekata, White Star Woman, and told her to stand in the east where she would be known as the Mother of all things. Tirawa then told Operikata (Morning Star) that he would be a warrior who would drive the people towards the west. To Karariwari, the North Star and one of the most important of the Stars, Tirawa turned and commanded that he stand in the north to be the chief of all the gods in the heavens. Then he spoke next to the four gods who are known collectively as the Stars of the Four Directions. In the northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest, they were told by Tirawa to stand and hold up the heavens. They were given the power to create and were in charge of issuing the Medicine Bundles to the Pawnee.

When Tirawa decided it was time for the Earth to be formed, he told all the gods, except for the Stars of the Four Directions, to take their stations. He sent the Stars of the Four Directions to White Star Woman in the form of Clouds, Winds, Lightnings and Thunders. She in turn placed them in between herself and her garden. Tirawa was now ready to drop the pebble that would become the Earth. The Stars of the Four Directions began to sing, summoning the Clouds, Winds, Lightnings and Thunders. Into them, Tirawa dropped his pebble. When the storm subsided, there was only water. The Stars of the Four Directions then struck the water with their war clubs. When they did this, the water separated and the Earth formed.

After the Earth was formed, again the Stars of the Four Directions began to sing, causing yet another storm. The Lightning that struck the Earth put life into it, while the Thunder evened out the landscape. The Wind then came and blew away the storm. Then Tirawa commanded the Stars of the Four Directions to cause other storms. The storms resulted in the establishment of plant life and the sweetening of the waters. The final destruction of the world is in the hands of the gods of the Four Directions. The West will issue the command and the East will obey it. The Stars will fall to Earth and become a new race of people, and the people left on the Earth will fly up into the sky and become Stars.

Morning Star conceived the idea of mating with White Star Woman, who was also known as Evening Star, and producing offspring who had the powers of both. Evening Star, however, refused Morning Star's courting. She arrayed various powers against Morning Star, including the Wolf (Sirius), the Cougar (Auriga), the Bear (Sagittarius), the Bobcat (Procyon) and the Snake (Scorpius). Although Evening Star continued to refuse him, Morning Star's power was so great that he was able to mate

with Evening Star against her wishes. A girl was born of this union, and the Sun mated with the Moon and produced a boy. The girl and the boy were placed on the Earth and gave birth to the Pawnee people. While other tribes claim they are descended from the wilderness, the Pawnee claim they are born of the Stars.

From this mating, the spirit of human beings called the Sishu was created. The Sishu is responsible for all acts of man during life. It resides in the breast, and appears in the spoken word, in the look of the eye, in the movement of the muscles. It is the Sishu that rattles in the throat of the dying in an attempt to escape. Because of this parentage, the spirit of human beings is divided into two parts, the emotions and the intellect. Human spirits were given their physical form by the power of Sakuru, the Sun and Pah, the Moon. The emotions represent our basic nature, but the intellectual part of the human spirit constantly seeks to control human beings. This conflict within us makes human beings unpredictable and capable of many things.

Pawnee Tribal Mythos

The courting of Evening Star by Morning Star is celebrated by the Pawnee as a spiritual dance that was taught to a Pawnee man in a vision by beings who immersed their hands in boiling water and handled fire with their hands. The beings told him that they had a new dance to teach him, and then they held him over the hot coals. After he survived this ordeal, they taught him the songs and dance and told him to take them to the people. Then the beings turned into birds and animals and left. The next night the man climbed a hill to fast, and again he met the beings sitting around a fire, singing and laughing. Again he was put through the fire ordeal, and the beings turned into birds and animals and left. This time, however, one of the beings stayed behind and taught the Pawnee man how to make the roach headdress, made of deer and porcupine hair that is dyed red, representing the fire ordeal. An eagle feather, in a bone spreader made from the shoulder blade of a deer, represents the man standing in the center of the fire. The bone represents the Medicine given to him. The Pawnee identified so strongly with this vision that one of their words for warrior, irushka, means 'they are inside the fire.'



Mayan Cosmology

The First Father and the First Mother created the Universe in three parts: the Heaven, the Earth and the Underworld. The Serpent of All-That-Is has two aspects, one in Heaven and one in the Underworld. Heaven is the home of the Star gods and the Underworld is called the 'awesome place.' The World Tree grows out of the body of the Serpent of All-That-Is, and its roots reach to the Underworld, while its branches reach up to Heaven. The Tree is everywhere, including within us. The Tree represents the center of the Universe, the axis around which everything else revolves. The Milky Way is the outer symbol of the World Tree, and is called 'the road to the awesome place.' When the Milky Way lay upon the horizon in May Land, there is a black space above it that is called the 'Black Transformer,' or 'Black Dreamplace.' This is the dark hole into which souls disappear toward the Otherworld. The celestial helpers laid the three sacred hearth stones in the sky called the Deer Stars (Orion's Belt), while the First Mother gave birth to the Universe.

The Jaguar



The journey of the sun across the sky and the darkness of night stand for the eternal journey of human consciousness and its transformations. The sun at midday is compared to the Eagle, flying high in the sky. Then it plunges below the horizon, just as we plunge into the dark where we face our spiritual challenges and are transformed. The hidden sun is said to be Jaguar, whose spotted skin symbolizes the Stars glittering in the night sky. Thus, it is called the "Jaguar Sun." Jaguar is the Earth Father. As Earth Father, he presides over the sacred power in the earth and the animals who live upon it. When the Jaguar passes through the Gate of the Abyss and travels through the Void, it is known as the Black Jaguar. In this form, the Jaguar brings the knowledge of Ancient Power beyond Creation, including the ability to renew oneself and gain immortality. The Jaguar's Wisdom includes seeing the roads within Chaos, moving without fear in the darkness, moving in unknown places, being a shape-shifter and psychic sight. The Black Jaguar's Wisdom includes being keeper of the circular time continuum and the Gatekeeper to the Unknowable.

It is literally true that we are the stuff that stars are made of; atoms of matter that took billions of years to travel from the center of stars to their surface were thrown into space at near-light speeds when the first generation of stars in the universe died. This matter later became the basis for other generations of stars, as well as planets and their life-forms. Medicine Men know that every cell in our bodies has a consciousness of its own, that we can 'see' with our entire bodies when aware of spiritual energies. Individual atoms themselves may have some form of awareness. Just as our spirits have traveled in many worlds, so our bodies also contain ancient knowledge and power.

SOURCE: <http://www.angelfire.com/md3/metis/st1.html>